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Evangelic Faith and Union :

RECOMMENDED IN A

SERMON,

On PHILIPPIANS i. 27.

PREACHED AT KIDDERMINSTER,

On the 11th of December, 1793,

BEFORE THE

ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES
IN WORCESTERSHIRE;

AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR DESIRE.

BY THE REV. GEORGE OSBORN.

" O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years!"

HABAKKUK.

" Endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit, in the bond of Peace.

PAUL.

Durate, and vosmet rebus fervate secundis.

VIRGIL.

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1794.

TO THE SEVERAL
MINISTERS AND CHURCHES,
COMPOSING THE
ASSOCIATION OF CALVINISTIC DISSENTERS
WITHIN THE COUNTY OF WORCESTER,
AND TO THE SERIOUS CHRISTIANS,
OF EVERY DENOMINATION,
WHO ARE CONCERNED FOR THE
SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE OF EVANGELIC TRUTH,
AND THE BEST INTERESTS OF MANKIND,
THE FOLLOWING
DISCOURSE,
SINCERELY INTENDED TO PROMOTE PURITY AND PEACE,
IS HUMBLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

ANGEL-STREET,
Worcester, February, 1794.



P R E F A C E.

THE following Discourse was preached on a public occasion, entirely without notes; and by the urgent desire of those who heard it, I promised, as far as possible, to recollect and publish it. This would have been done sooner, but a severe indisposition, and several important engagements since, both at home and abroad, will make my apology. As to the general sentiments and design of the Sermon, I must here observe, that they appear to me of the greatest moment; and I desire them to be examined with the utmost seriousness. But as to the composition and enlargement, I must crave the indulgence of my Brethren and Friends who attended the Meeting since; though I have scrupulously adhered to the original plan, and even endeavoured to give the very language first used, yet I cannot be certain but some things may be found added, and other things omitted. However, even these little alterations, and the notes subjoined, may not prove either disagreeable or useless: and if amidst many arduous labors as a Minister and Tutor, this fresh attempt to strengthen and unite my Fellow Christians, shall meet with their candid approbation, and the divine blessing, all my expectations will be abundantly answered, and He alone shall have the glory, “ whose I am, and whom “ I serve.”

The immediate object of our Meeting at KIDDERMINSTER, was to determine upon some plan for a more orderly and RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION of Ministers and Churches, professedly united in principle. I am happy that my poor exertions for mutual enjoyment and usefulness, in this respect, met with such a cordial reception; and I cannot better explain the whole business, or introduce my address to the Public more respectably, than by transcribing into this Preface, the Minutes then drawn up.

KIDDERMINSTER, Dec. 11, 1793.

AT A MEETING OF MINISTERS,

HELD HERE THIS DAY,

P R E S E N T,

The Rev. Mr. HUNT, of Stourbridge;
 Mr. DAWSON, of Evesham;
 Mr. OSBORN, of Worcester;
 Mr. ROGERS, of Bromsgrove;
 Mr. SMITH, of Pershore;
 Mr. BARRETT, of Kidderminster;
 Mr. LEWIS, of Worcester.

The following RESOLUTIONS were unanimously agreed to, after solemn Prayer for the Divine Direction and Favor:—

Rev. J. BARRETT, Moderator.

I. That we, the above-named Ministers, do from this time form ourselves into an Association, for the support of Evangelic Truth, and the revival of Practical Godliness, both in ourselves and others.

II. That this Association be composed only of Ministers and congregational Churches in the County of Worcester, who profess Calvinistic Sentiments, and admit of Free Communion.

III. That no Minister, or Church, be admitted into this Association, without the unanimous consent of all the Members, after having been proposed at a previous Meeting.

IV. That an Annual Meeting be held every Midsummer (as appointed), when the state of our respective churches shall be represented,—a Circular Letter, drawn up and addressed to them, be printed,—and three subsequent Meetings for the rest of the year be fixed upon.

V. That at the above Meeting we assemble on the Tuesday Evening, and next morning at the Vestry, for the purposes of Prayer, and arranging the various business.

VI. That the persons who are to engage in prayer and preaching, shall be appointed, if possible, the quarter before, by the Minister at whose place the Meeting is to be held, who is also to act as moderator.

VII. That the expences of conducting this Association, be defrayed by Voluntary Subscriptions, from our respective churches or others, to be committed into the hands of a Treasurer, at every Annual Meeting.

VIII. That Mr. JOHN WATSON, of Kidderminster, be requested to act as our Treasurer; and to receive any contribution that may be kindly offered for the encouragement of this Association.

IX. That we do sincerely concur, with our Brethren in various places, in the propriety of observing a Monthly Meeting for Prayer, at Seven o'Clock, viz. on the First Monday of every Calendar Month;—for the revival of true religion in our own country, and for the spread of the Gospel through every land.

X. That Mr. OSBORN be requested to print and publish the Sermon this day delivered, at the expence of the Association; and that the next Meeting be held at Stourbridge, on the First Wednesday (i. e. the 5th) of March, ensuing.

N. B. Mr. BARRETT and Mr. LEWIS are to preach.

ASSOCIATION SERMON.

PHILIP. i. 27.

THAT YE STAND FAST IN ONE SPIRIT, WITH ONE MIND
STRIVING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL.

WHILE so many are anxious to blow the trumpet of discord and of error, to magnify public fears and calamities, and to widen rather than heal our unhappy breaches, I am directed to recommend to your most serious attention, at this time, the infinitely superior concerns of Christian truth, love, and zeal. Feeling my own mind deeply impressed with the importance of immediate union and exertion, to revive and promote evangelical religion; and being called to this solemn work by the voice of my respected

Brethren and Friends, I am encouraged to hope, that ye will receive the word of exhortation with candor and affection; and in your various places endeavour to afford every possible assistance, to our future associations, while we simply intend the glory of God, and the good of souls.—For this purpose I have selected the words of St. Paul to the Church at Philippi; and they seem very suitable to direct and rouse our too languid efforts in religion, as well as to present a beautiful view of Primitive Christianity.

The Apostle's design in this epistle, exactly corresponds with the intention of our associating; and expresses what always should be the design and endeavour of evangelic ministrations. It was written to the Philippians, says Dr. Doddridge,* “ To check a
 “ party spirit that appears to have broke
 “ out among them, and to promote, on the
 “ contrary, an entire union and harmony of
 “ affection; to guard them against being se-
 “ duced from the purity of the Christian
 “ faith, by Judaizing teachers; to support

* *Vide* his general introduction to this epistle, in the fifth volume of the Family Expositor.

“ them under the trials with which they
 “ struggled; and, above all, to inspire them
 “ with a concern to adorn their profession,
 “ by the most eminent attainments in the
 “ divine life.” How excellent and suitable
 was this advice to the infant church of Christ,
 weak, and persecuted, and endangered as it
 then was! And, my brethren, how equally
 good and important for us in our present
 circumstances! Are not our churches too
 generally infected with the unhallowed spirit
 of party, political or religious? Are not our
 exertions for comfort and usefulness narrowed
 or broken, through the want of union and
 benevolence? And what unwearied pains are
 taken, in private and public, from the pul-
 pit and the press, to discard the saving truths
 of the glorious Gospel, and seduce the young,
 the unthinking, and unsteady, from the sim-
 plicity that is in Christ, to the delusive opi-
 nions of pretended philosophy—the cold and
 ineffectual system of an assumed *rational reli-
 gion*, and the proud and faithless boast of a
 spurious morality!

Such are the trials, combined with the more public evils of war, and deserved judgments, which now afflict our country, and our respective societies. Much do the tender-hearted and the timid need the consolations of the divine word and grace; and much do all the professors of genuine Christianity need to be warned against a criminal conformity to the world;—to be roused from supineness and indifference in the things of God, and to be animated with purer zeal for the doctrine and service of our Divine Redeemer.

With these views let me recommend to your serious attention the text first mentioned,—“That ye stand fast in one spirit, “with one mind striving together for the “faith of the Gospel.” The connection of these words is remarkably instructive. St. Paul esteemed it matter of thankfulness and joy, that the Philippians had received the Gospel by his ministry. But his concern for their spiritual growth and improvement, was constant and sincere; and, therefore, in his absence he exhorts them to a progress in holiness and love, agreeable to their privileges and hopes. “Only,” says he, “let

“ your conversation,”*—your citizenship, your temper and deportment,—“ be as it “ becometh the Gospel of Christ.” This confers true spiritual freedom and honor, and this directs to the noblest perfection of character: “ That whether I come and see you, or else “ be absent, I may hear of your affairs,”—that I may share in all your conflicts, and in all your enjoyments, being assured “ that ye “ stand fast,” &c.

Our text, thus introduced, is full of most pertinent meaning:—that ye, whether ministers or people, ye who profess allegiance to Christ, and the expectation of partaking in his future kingdom of glory,—that ye *stand fast*, as pilots at the helm, skilful and

* The word πολιτευεσθε signifies, most literally, to behave as denizens (or freemen) of some city or corporation; and Dr. Scott would render the term, “ Citizen it as becomes the Gospel.”—*Vide Doddridge in loco.* Certainly to converse or discourse together like Christians, is the lowest idea in the text, though a useful and necessary admonition: but to live and act as freemen and heirs of Heaven, this indeed is the noblest motive—the sublimest designation! And this is urged again, iii. 20. For our conversation, *i. e.* (πολιτευμα) our citizenship is in Heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, &c. “ Nostra autem Civitas est in cœlis,” &c. says Beza.

steady, observant of your infallible guide, and faithful to your important trust: or as centinels upon a post of honor and difficulty; stand fast, true to your engagements, honest to your charge, and devoted to your great captain's orders. *In one spirit*,* sharing the same gracious influence, enlightened with the same truth, and equally directed in your reason and judgment to one great and blessed object. *With one mind*, i. e. with one consent of will, and the same tendency of affection and desire; *striving together*, like wrestlers in the combat for a glorious prize, or fellow soldiers contending earnestly for victory;—that ye Christians, with equal, with nobler ardor strive together for *the faith of the Gospel*—not for an earthly inferior good, but for what is spiritual and immortal; for the confirmation of your own belief, and trust, and hope; for the illumination and

* Πνευμα ad mentium atque judiciorum consensum, ψυχη verò ad voluntatum conspirationem referatur. Cæterum verbo συναθλῆν inest argumentum ab eventu utili;—viz. à præmio quod athletic dari solet, si fortiter pugnaverint; nam verbum ἀθλεῖν à nomine ἀθλον deductum est, quod præmium significat, &c.

Vide Piscator in loco.

conversion of the world around you; and for displaying and promoting the glory of God our Saviour. This I apprehend to be something of the import of my text: critical hearers will observe peculiar strength and beauty in the original; but to enter more fully into our subject this day, I propose with divine help to discourse from hence, of the principle, of the object, and of the means for evangelic association and exertion.

I. *The great principle* of all religion, and the very soul of Christian zeal and union, is here expressed; viz. steadfastness in one spirit and one mind. Now it seems highly important to assert and maintain this groundwork of our comfort, and bond of exertion, in opposition equally to the prevailing notions of frigid and erroneous scepticism, which denies such spiritual participation and fellowship; and to the flights of unreasonable and presumptuous enthusiasm, which arrogates to itself the impulse of Divinity, to sanction its extravagancies, and palliate licentiousness. We know, and believe, and I trust feel, that every thing in the religion of Jesus, is infinitely reasonable in itself,

promotive of universal order, and thus conducive to the glory of God, in the holiness and happiness of man. But we also know, and believe, and confess, that this religion in its experience and power, is not self-derived, or the result of mere speculation, or the creature of external motives: no—but the special gift and gracious operation of God. Therefore I am led to observe, in order to methodize our subject,

1. This supposes *a divine influence*:—for to stand fast, our souls must first be wrought upon, by that one Spirit, who is the true and only source of wisdom, grace, and love. Thus the Apostle describes the Philippians as “Saints in Christ Jesus, in whom God
 “had begun a good work, which he was
 “confident he would carry on and finish,
 “as they were partakers of the same grace
 “with himself,” vi. 6, 7. And it is worthy our notice, that the same Apostle ascribes all ministerial zeal and ability, to the sovereign operation of the Divine Spirit:—“For,” says he, (2 Cor. iv. 5, 6.) “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake: be-

“ cause God who commanded the light to
 “ shine out of the darkness, hath shined into
 “ our hearts, &c.” And the Apostle further
 speaking of the ground and reason for mu-
 tual love, and united efforts in the faith and
 service of the Gospel, expressly declares that
 all believers “ Drink into one and the same
 “ spirit;—and that all are changed into the
 “ same image, from glory to glory, even as
 “ by the spirit of the Lord.”—2 COR. iii. 18.

Here then I am instructed, that the doc-
 trine of divine influence, is the doctrine of
 the bible:—that it is not the cant of fanatics,
 or the trick of priests, but the sober dictate
 of inspired and recorded truth. I am also
 instructed, that this gracious influence is
essential to every individual Christian—to
 every minister—and to every regular church.
 Thus quickened, our native darkness, error,
 and carnality shall be subdued; we shall be
 led to renounce our own imaginary righteouf-
 ness, our intellectual accomplishments, and
 our boasted moral ability: *— while our

* I take this occasion to guard my hearers and readers
 against what I conceive a very destructive, spreading error;

hearts purified from inferior motives, and our souls animated by the love of God, and the energy of his grace, we shall be enabled simply to embrace his promised assistance;

the pretence of morality without religion, and that fanciful benevolence, or *goodness of heart*, with which unbelievers and libertines compliment themselves and each other.—To exhibit instances of the glaring absurdity and mischief of such fashionable sentiments, let me fix your attention upon the great patrons and examples of modern scepticism, the celebrated Voltaire and Rousseau. The former of these died as he lived; unsubdued by the faith of the Gospel, filled with self-conceit, and yet trembling at the prospect of future judgment and destruction!—"I will give you," said he to his physician, "the half of my fortune if you save my life, even for six months; if not I shall go to the Devil and you along with me."—The latter, Rousseau, lived, and wrote, and died as full of vanity, corruption, and arrogance; but if possible more awfully deluded, and malignant in his opposition to God. For, be it remarked, this man cohabited with an ignorant woman, whom he would not marry: by her he had five children, whom, though against the cries and tears of their mother, he sent to the public foundling hospital at Paris, as soon as born; and saw them no more! Besides this, his prodigality and intrigues were notorious: yet this *unnatural* and licentious man declares boldly, that he surrendered his soul as pure as he received it, and demanded life and glory as his right from the Creator! Now is it not strange that of such a proud, depraved infidel, we should read in a very respectable publication, "That, upon the whole

to go forth “ strong in the Lord, and in the “ power of his might;” and to stand fast in the faith, the liberty, and the hope of the gospel.—But, is it not natural, that where the divine influence is unfought and rejected, men should be left to their own delusions!—that error and vanity should prevail among professors, and discord and formality consume their societies?

2. *An enlightened judgment*, respecting the truth and doctrines of Christianity, is the certain consequence of this divine influence, and perhaps the exact meaning of the text: the word spirit, as descriptive of man, intending his rational or intellectual facul-

whole, he appears, with all his imperfections, a good and amiable man, his heart glowing with sincere benevolence and love of virtue!” Surely such cannot be the estimates of sober reason and truth; and I rather conclude with the excellent Mr. Fletcher, that “ Rousseau died as full of himself, as Voltaire was of the wicked one.” These were some of his last words:—“ It is God that calls me.—How pleasing is death to a man not conscious of *any sin*.—O God! my soul is now as *pure* as when it first came from thy hands;—crown it with thy heavenly bliss!” From self and Satan, the internal and external fiend, good Lord deliver us!

Vide Monthly Review for 1790, Vol. II. p. 564—571.

And Fletcher’s posthumous Letters, p. 264.—265.

ties, which are certainly the proper and first subject of divine operation. Now as in a state of nature and sin, “ The understanding “ is darkened through the ignorance that is “ in us;” so, on the contrary, in a state of grace, “ The eyes of our understanding “ are illuminated;” and then only do we perceive or relish the beauty, excellence, and power of the truth as it is in Jesus.* Thus it does not appear sufficient for our enjoyment of salvation, by Christ, that the most glorious things are revealed and asserted concerning him; but it is absolutely necessary, that our minds be rectified and suitably disposed to believe and receive him :—as the sweetest harmony of sounds cannot delight the deaf; nor the loveliest scenes of nature afford pleasure to the blind.—Neither is this all, for,

* This heavenly instruction is directly promised, Isaiah liv. 13. and our blessed Lord repeats and confirms it, John vi. 45. after declaring that “ No man can come to him except the Father draw him;” i. e. not merely enlighten, but convince and allure: therefore as he adds “ Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” Thus “ His people are made willing in the day of his power, in the beauty of holiness.” Psalm cx. 3.

3. *The heart* also must be warmed, by the same sacred energy operating thus through the faculties of the mind. And here I should observe the beautiful distinction of the Apostle, between the πνεῦμα and the ψυχή, translated Spirit and mind; but more correctly expressing the *intellect and the will*, as is judiciously remarked by the learned critic, quoted in a note above.* And thus it appears, that when the Spirit of God acts upon the soul, and discovers the blessed doctrines of the Gospel, in their worth and importance to the understanding, then the will is bowed to the obedience of the truth, the heart is impressed with the love of Christ, and all the affections are engaged. Such is the happy mean of spiritual comfort, and such the powerful motive to zeal and obedience; for “the love of Christ constraineth us, while we *thus judge*,” &c.† But if ministers or people do not thus judge, that men are helpless

* This distinction is strongly marked in 1 Theff. v. 23. “I pray God your whole *Spirit* and *Soul*, and *Body*, be preserved blameless.”—See Chandler’s Notes on this passage, and also the Author’s quoted in Mason on Self-knowledge.

† See the whole of this charming passage, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

sinners, that Christ died to redeem them by his blood, and that all who are thus redeemed must live to his glory in true holiness:— I say if men do not thus judge according to Divine teaching, is it any wonder that they remain under the bondage of legal ignorance and fears, perplexed, disconsolate, and unfruitful? And is it any greater wonder, that where such evangelic sentiments are exploded, and such affectionate experience is derided, ministers should become dull and lifeless, and their hearers indifferent and unprofitable?

4. *Steadiness* then under such a blessed influence, in the vital apprehension of heavenly truth, and the cordial submission of the heart and life to its dictates; this is the great matter of the Apostle's exhortation, and of his earnest wish for the Philippian converts.* It is not a transient impulse upon the passions,

* The same exhortation is repeatedly given; see especially 1 Cor. xvi. 13. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong:"—the spirit of which words is happily transferred into the following lines:

"Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armour on,

"Strong in the strength which God supplies, through his eternal Son.

"Strong in the Lord of Hosts, and in his mighty pow'r,

"Who in the strength of Jesus trusts, is more than conqueror."

WESLEY.

nor a mere profession of gospel principles, that he desires and urges; but one fixed uniform, and active maintenance of faith, love, and obedience. That ye stand fast, as I hinted in the paraphrase, like pilots, or like soldiers; not shaken either in opinion or in conduct, by surrounding temptations of fashion or of folly; but intimately united to your great head, and animated by one soul of charity and hope; that ye resist all corrupt opposition from the world, and remain to the end strong and faithful.

Having thus endeavoured to establish the principle both of personal and social religion, I proceed to consider,

II. *The grand object* of Christian zeal; the ground, and rule, and end of mutual comfort and exertion, is *the faith of the Gospel*.—We are exhorted to strive together for this purpose, that Gospel truth might be maintained in its simplicity; and gospel holiness in all its beauty. is to this object that I would now particularly claim your regard, as the common foundation of our hopes, the subject of our ministry, and the true attractive centre of evangelic union.

To describe this faith of the Gospel, allow me to observe, that it is not a worldly thing; its origin, and nature, and tendency, are greatly superior to all present secular concerns; it does not interfere with our civil rights or circumstances; but it is a spiritual concern between God and our souls, upon which Eternity depends.

Neither is this Faith the little interest of a party. It is in dignity and worth highly exalted above all the meaner views, the turbulent passions, and unavailing competitions of mankind. With equal majesty and benevolence, it imposes a holy restraint upon the rage of bigotry, persecution, and violence: and breathes nothing but "peace upon earth, and good-will towards men." Like the sun in the firmament of Heaven, the Faith of Jesus Christ illuminates the whole church of God; and while it supremely attracts our souls to himself, it also directs and quickens our respective spheres of duty in the world; and maintains the subordinate attraction of love one to another.

I must also remark, that in being called to maintain the faith of the gospel, we have

nothing to do with the decrees of councils, the formularies of superstition, or the systems of fathers. Creeds and forms of men's invention, may be right, or may be wrong;* but whatever they be, we dare not put them upon a level with divine revelation; much less dare we obtrude them upon conscience, and fence them round with damnatory sentences, or worldly emoluments. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this rule, there is no light in them."

Once more, be it remembered, that we are not to substitute the conceits of philo-

* I am happy in this place to declare, for myself and my associated brethren, that the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, are in our apprehension agreeable to the faith of the Gospel; and I believe it will be found upon enquiry, that the truths contained in them, are no where more plainly or successfully maintained, than in Dissenting Churches and Chapels. The number of *Socinian Rationalists* is very few compared with the great body of Calvinistic Dissenters: yet some of those being forward prominent figures in the piece, throw us into the back ground shade; and thus we are either totally overlooked, as of no consequence; or else to serve a turn, confounded and abused with bolder and more restless Brethren! But it is a very "little thing to be judged of thus by men; while we know assuredly, that he who judgeth us is the Lord."

fophy for the doctrine of Christ; nor to mingle the fanciful notions of modern scepticism, with “the faith once delivered to the “Saints.” Neither can we, without injuring the simplicity of the Gospel, inculcate the unprincipled morality of mere heathenism, as the whole of religion; no more than we should recommend, as the ground of hope, opinions, however orthodox, without vital godliness, and the fruits of holy obedience.

No! Brethren, “The world by wisdom “knew not God;” and all the additions of human science, or the alterations of human pride, respecting Gospel faith, are but like the tawdry trappings, or tasteless painting of a statue; in itself full of symmetry, expression, and beauty:—they only mar, or maim an excellence, infinitely, superior, as well to the vulgar comprehension, as to the feeble efforts of mankind.

More particularly to assist our enquiry and our recollection, we shall briefly consider the Faith of the Gospel in three distinct points of view; (*viz.*) as the matter of revelation, of comfort, and of usefulness.

1. The faith of the Gospel is a *system of divine truth*, revealed and attested by God:— it is made up of doctrine, of precept, and of promise; it is Gospel, as containing good news, and bringing glad tidings to sinful men; and it is styled the faith, in this and other places, as claiming the credit, and consent, and confidence of our souls. Thus St. Paul terms it, “The glorious Gospel of “the blessed God:”—and St. Jude, “The “Faith once delivered to the Saints.”* *Vide* 1 Tim. i. 10. Jude v. 3.

Now by consulting these, and various other passages, we shall find, that the grand import of this Gospel, as the matter of our Faith, is *Salvation*. Not mere intellectual light, nor perfect example, nor unoperative rules of moral conduct; but a most blessed and suitable provision discovered in Christ Jesus, for the supply of all our spiritual wants, and for the bestowment of pardon, grace, and everlasting happiness. Herein we have revealed the original determination

* Quæ fides ita semel tradita est, ut postea nunquam sit immutanda: itaque pro viribus tueamini eam, sanâ scilicet doctrinâ, and vitæ exemplis.——BEZÆ.

of sovereign wisdom and love, for the redemption of sinners. To accomplish this great end, Christ is held forth as the mediator and surety, the sacrifice and righteousness of his people. We are instructed that, for this purpose, the Son of God, essentially divine and perfect, assumed our human nature; and in this form lived, and died, and rose, the friend and Saviour of helpless, guilty creatures!

By the Faith of the Gospel we are instructed, under the authority of God, in the utter apostacy and misery of man as a sinner; and we are directed to the atonement of Christ as the only medium of reconciliation—the price and mean of pardon, peace, and happiness. Divine truth also teaches the necessity of regeneration by the Spirit of God, in order to receive and enjoy the blessing, or bring forth the fruits of the Gospel. And in the assured prospect of final resurrection and judgment, we are warned, that, “Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;” or enjoy his glorious presence.

These, my Christian Brethren, are, in my serious apprehension, the main articles

of our Faith. They are not corruptions;—they are not additions;—they are not immaterial points:—they seem to me, and I am persuaded to my Brother Ministers present, to constitute the very essence of evangelic faith. And you will allow me to remark here, with respect to the nature of revealed truth, it is equally *divine*, *fixed*, sufficient and perpetually *binding*. Being a direct emanation from the great Father of Lights, it eminently partakes of his perfection, and must therefore be always the same. Human science and philosophy are necessarily progressive. Arts, manufacture, and civil policy, advance by continued efforts and experiments to increasing excellence. And the range of mental improvement, and the condition of mankind (as members of civilized society) expand and meliorate through successive gradations.*

* “Philosophy, and Truth divine,
 “With rays unmixt, distinctly shine;
 “*That* from a small and muddy source,
 “Swells, and refines thro’ all her course;
 “*This* from th’ eternal fount of light,
 “Unchanging flows divinely bright:
 “And, like the lucid spring of day,
 “Emits a pure incessant ray.”——FRANCIS.

But it is not so with the faith once delivered to the Saints. In this dispensation, “the work of God is perfect;” and spiritual good, thus derived, is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Our posterity will doubtless regard present attainments in science, as the infant labours of the human mind; and our proudest boasters of philosophic eminence will, to future Boyles and Newtons, appear but as babes and children in natural knowledge. But as to the effects and advantages of evangelic faith, they were as great and good in the apostolic, or reforming age, as now: and Paul or John—Latter or Owen—Edwards or Howard,* (tho’ eminently primitive in religious sentiment) will scarcely be out-done in holiness, benevolence, or zeal for God and his glory, by any modernized professors of Christianity.

* See a very deserved testimony to this Christian philanthropist in “Fuller’s Comparison of the Socinian and Calvinistic Systems,” page 143: a book which I beg leave to recommend as full of sound reasoning; written in the true spirit of evangelic candor, and admirably calculated to establish pure and undefiled religion, both in principle and practice.

2. The faith of the Gospel may also be considered as the *matter of personal belief*—the ground of comfort and of hope. This is what we understand by that faith which is the operation and gift of God—a new discernment of truth—a cordial reception of it into the heart, and an entire dependence upon it for guidance, support, and enjoyment.

“ For by Grace we are saved, thro’ Faith.”

i. e. (as I understand it) a believing capacity, conferred by a divine influence, enabling the soul instrumentally to apprehend the free favour and love of God in Christ Jesus. This vital principle of all religion regards the word of truth as its object; and while it cheerfully embraces the declarations of the Gospel, builds on them the superstructure of devotion, purity, and love.

By Faith we receive Christ as our great Prophet, Priest, and King: by Faith we feel the influence of his pardoning blood, and the rich consolations of his Spirit: by Faith we are assured of the unfailing ability of our Lord to protect and save us, in every trying danger. By the same Faith we are intimately united to him and to each other, in mutual

fellowship; and by this sanctifying Grace, we realize and anticipate future immortality, boundless perfection, and everlasting glory.* Thus influenced and blessed, the Apostles and Martyrs, and all the faithful followers of Jesus, lived greatly superior to the world;—eminently patient, righteous, and useful in their stations: and thus they triumphed over error, persecution, and death itself.

Brethren, is not this an object worthy of our prayer, our cultivation, our united zeal? Have we not all immortal, sinful souls to be saved or lost for ever? And is there any other method of redemption for us, than Faith in the full and complete work of our Lord Jesus Christ? “Other foundation can no man lay.” This alone breaks the power of guilt, and sin, and the world, and self: this alone restores and unites the wandering heart to God; this administers light in darkness,—strength in temptation,—comfort in every sorrow, and a hope full of immortality! “For this is the victory that

* Thus the Apostle to the Hebrews, defines this grace, ch. xi. 1. “Now Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

“overcometh the world, even our Faith.”
Let us, therefore, determine to know nothing
but Christ, and him crucified; and rest
confident that he is able to save, even to
the uttermost.

Shou'd all the forms that men devise,
Assault my faith with treach'rous art;
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the Gospel to my heart.—WATTS.

3. We may farther consider our main ob-
ject—the Faith of the Gospel—with respect
to its *general usefulness*, as it involves the best
interests of mankind, and is the only grand
and effectual mean of promoting universal
happiness. To enlighten the ignorant—
to reform the profligate*—to comfort the
mourning—to banish discord and enmity—
to extend the influence of holiness and love:

* “*Send them an Enthusiast*, was the reply of a political
“divine to a nobleman who asked how he could reform the
“profligate people of CALNE. Honest confession! Noble
“testimony!—What is the reproach and reviling of the
“world, if (by preaching the Gospel faithfully) we are
“made useful in bringing perishing sinners to Repentance
“Salvation.”

See an excellent Sermon of the Rev. WM. JAY, on the Import-
ance of Truth relative to Ministerial Usefulness.

—these are indeed great and worthy designs ; these are, I trust, our prevailing objects, as Ministers and Professors of Christ ; and these I now recommend, as the special, avowed, and *only purpose* of our Association. I am very free to confess, that our zeal in past times, has bore no proportion to the magnitude of these concerns. We have, indeed, united, with others, for the removal of political grievances ; and in this cause we have witnessed great exertions of eloquence, of learning, and of liberality. But may we not infer, from the repeated defeats of such endeavours, that we are thus corrected for the neglect of infinitely greater things, and for the unnatural mixture of civil contentions with religious interests ? As Christians, we have one common rule and end of conduct with our countrymen and fellow-protestants : and to propagate the faith of the Gospel is, and should be, our general and united concern. But if through misapprehension of our views, as Dissenters ; or through the remaining spirit of persecution, others will not accord with us, but rather chuse to load us with obloquy, and cramp

our exertions by injurious distinctions,—let us, in the name of Christ, and actuated by his pure and peaceful spirit, shew that our supreme and sole object is the glory of God, and the steady avowal, and zealous spread of Gospel Truth, and obedience.

After thus attempting to establish the Principle, and to illustrate the Object of our intended union and exertion, I advance to the particular business now before us, (*viz.*)

III. To consider *the means* by which we are exhorted and encouraged to seek establishment and success. Our text admonishes professed Christians to strive together (*i. e.* to *wrestle* with united zeal) for the Faith of the Gospel: and adopting the same image, St. Jude exhorts us to contend earnestly (*i. e.* to *agonize* as combatants in the antient games) for the Faith once delivered to the Saints. But here let it ever be remembered, that as the design and end are spiritual, peaceful, and benevolent, so must all the subordinate means be: and the only strife warranted by the religion of Jesus, is the united efforts of reason and love.

Here then allow me plainly to state what I conceive is implied, and what is recommended in thus striving together.

1. *Harmony in evangelic sentiment* appears to me essentially necessary; for without this there can be no true union in affection, and consequently no strength, no beauty, no delight, no success in our endeavours. As racers in the Christian course we must have our hearts set upon the same glorious prize set before us in the Gospel. "To win Christ, and be found in him," must be our one great aim for ourselves; and to recommend him for wisdom, righteousness, and salvation, to a sinful, perishing world; this must be our simple, steady endeavour, in "every work of faith, and labour of love." While, therefore, we respect the rights of conscience, and avoid prescribing all unscriptural terms of communion, either in our separate churches, or our associated body, let us at the same time be firm in our attachment to Gospel principles, and come together to strengthen and animate each other, "in our most holy faith." Indifference, scepticism, and *graceless* candor, seem to me as

much at enmity with truth and holiness, as the mad presumption of Antinomian error, or the wild licentiousness of modern manners. Indeed, the extremes of *Rationalists* and *Antinomians* wonderfully meet: and whether by open attack, or secret sap, are equally hostile to the humbling doctrine, and sanctifying Spirit of Christ.

2. We are called upon to *strive together by Prayer*.^{*} Convinced of want and weakness, —of sin and of danger; and apprehending the fullness of mercy and grace, which are treasured up in Christ Jesus, let us come lowly and boldly to the divine throne. The connection between evangelic sentiment, and the exercise and enjoyment of prayer, both as a gift and as a grace, strikes me very forcibly: and I am verily persuaded, that in proportion as we slight or reject the principle, so do we neglect the practice, and lose the benefit of faithful supplication. If I think lightly of sin, or degradingly of the Saviour, I have nothing to excite contrition—nothing

^{*} This is particularly urged by the Apostle, Rom. xv. 30. "Now I beseech you Brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God."

to encourage hope; no wonder, then, that the world intrudes to bar me from fellowship with God;—no wonder that my conduct becomes remiss, my love cold, and my zeal dead. The same reasoning will apply to churches, and larger societies of professed Christians; and the spiritual declensions of such as even partially renounce the faith of the Gospel; their conformity to the corrupt fashions of the world—their want of order and mutual union, and their glaring neglect of social prayer:—these facts are awful warnings to us, Brethren; and they loudly call upon every friend to vital religion, to stand fast in one Spirit, and to strive by earnest, repeated prayer, for the Faith of the Gospel.

Agreeably to this part of my subject, I have to recommend to all my Brethren and friends, an explicit agreement in observing a monthly public exercise of prayer; as well for the revival of religion in our respective societies, as for the success of the Gospel in our own country, and the spread of it in foreign lands. This is an important part of our intended plan; and I am happy to observe it has lately been adopted with great ardor, by many

surrounding congregations. Nor can I avoid remarking, that amidst the dark cloud of judgments which at present threaten us, this spirit of prayer, like a ray of light, breaks forth to relieve the gloom; and at once discovers both our danger and our remedy. Surely it is some token for good; that the Lord has not totally forsaken us, but that we shall yet see and praise his loving kindness.

3. *Regular and frequent association*, both as Christians and as united churches;—this seems to me to have the happiest aspect upon our comfort and our usefulness. “*Divide and conquer*” is a maxim well understood and too fatally adopted, both by the men of the world, and the great enemy of souls. It does in reality appear, that though professing one common Lord, one scriptural way of Salvation, and one hope of future blessedness; yet we have little, very little communion in the great things which belong to our mutual peace and prosperity. And the consequences of such disunion are sadly apparent:—laxity with respect to important truth,—loss of Christian friendship,—want of confirmation and encouragement,—the too

much deserved censure of the world, and the neglect of great opportunities for getting and for doing good. I appeal to your consciences, and to the state of your different churches, whether this be not the case? Surely then, it is high time to awake, and arouse, and bestir ourselves in the momentous affairs of God and of souls. And it does appear to me with great force, that we are now peculiarly called and encouraged, not to look every man at his own things, but at the things, the interest of others. Single, and separate from each other; unconnected by any avowed bond of affection or sentiment; we are easily broken; our wished for order, peace, and comfort, become every day more weak, exposed, and endangered. But if explicitly united in principle, love, and exertion, how strong and effectual would the various churches of Christ appear! To this union then, I now earnestly invite and press you all.

Our association is not political. The intention of our solemnly assembling together is, not to indulge in secular discussions, to meddle in the affairs of civil government, or to foment the spirit of discontent and party. Far

be all such unworthy and pernicious objects from our desires and pursuits ! But though thus misunderstood and calumniated, let us not be discouraged ; while our design is sincerely good, we must proceed in the use of appointed means ; and we have the best reason to expect, that God, and his blessing will be with us.

4th and lastly. We should strive together for the Faith of the Gospel, by contributing our endeavours *to instruct the poor*, especially the young ;—to support the preaching of faithful ministers, in such places as are destitute of evangelic instruction ; and to promote, if possible, the sending of missionaries into distant nations. These are objects confessedly great and important. It is pleasing to see something done in so good a cause ; and I hope and trust, Christians of all denominations, will unite more cordially and successfully to carry it into effect.* But

* The society established in Northamptonshire, Birmingham, &c. for the spreading of the Gospel among the Heathen, deserves every encouragement. They have contributed with truly Christian generosity ; and from the mission sent out by them to the East Indies, we may reasonably expect that some important good will result. See the account published in the Baptist Register, for 1793.

here the ministers of Christ must resort to you, the people of our respective charges for advice and encouragement. Lend us your assistance in heart and in hand, to prosecute these noble undertakings. Worldly associations are warmly and liberally supported; and schemes of profit, or of pleasure, call forth general exertion. Shall the cause of God alone be neglected? Shall truth still languish for want of friends?—And can you suffer only your *Ministers* to strive together for the Faith of the Gospel?—As therefore you value religion, in sentiment or experience; as you feel the worth of immortal souls; as you wish well to your country and the world; and as you regard the glory of God our Saviour, let me beseech you all to guard against a selfish, worldly, and indifferent spirit; and see to it as a matter of infinite moment, that ye “stand fast, “rooted and grounded in the truth, of one “mind and heart,” praying earnestly for divine aid; meeting together on all suitable and allowed occasions; and in temper, conduct, and doctrine; “That ye shine as lights in “the world, holding forth the word of life.”

Thus have I attempted, as proposed, to explain and apply my text:—it remains only,

IV. To enforce attention to this interesting subject, by suggesting a few motives to quicken and unite us.

1. The infinite worth and importance of the Christian Faith, powerfully address both our reason and our affections, and urge us to give this our decided preference, and to employ every mean for its support and progress. Other systems have been invented, and are artfully, and too successfully propagated. Let us oppose them not with intolerant rage, or persecuting violence, but by the more certain and amiable influence, of steady confidence in God, unaffected profession of the truth as it is in Jesus, and daily obedience to all its holy requirements.

2. The deplorable state of mankind, destitute of religion, affectingly calls upon us, in this highly-favored land, to strive for more general good.—Out of eight hundred millions of souls, which is the supposed population of the world, it appears from surveys

lately made,* that four hundred and eighty-one millions are still sunk in total darkness, heathenism, and idolatry! Of the rest, one hundred and forty millions are Mahometans; nine millions Jews; and only one hundred and seventy millions are *nominal* Christians! Of these latter, ninety millions are Papists, or Catholics; thirty millions Greeks and Armenians; and fifty millions only are called Protestants! But of this latter number, how few comparatively are alive to God: and how much do error, hypocrisy, and sin prevail, even among the most privileged! “Oh! when shall the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ!” When shall the knowledge of salvation be universal, and all nations be blessed with the light and power of the Gospel!

Brethren, the wretched condition of sinners forcibly addresses all our noblest feelings, and

* Let me here recommend the Circular Letter lately published by the WARWICKSHIRE ASSOCIATION, price Sixpence. This letter contains a more detailed account of some things glanced at above; and is a judicious and affectionate address to the serious friends of evangelical religion. May other countries follow their example!

calls us to unite our prayers, our influence, and our utmost exertions to enlighten and reform them: and remember, the only effectual instrument to be thus employed, is the Word and Gospel of Christ. Science may expand the mind; arts and manufactures may provide for present support; commerce may enrich; and spreading humanity may liberate the enslaved: but the Religion of Jesus alone can save immortal souls.

3. Another argument for religious union and activity, may be justly derived *from our past neglects*; our barrenness, disunion, worldly-mindedness, and want of comfort, both as churches, and as individuals. And here I unfeignedly desire to be humbled before God, under a sense of my own omissions and defects; and I call upon my brethren in the ministry also to receive this message of reproof and exhortation. May we not with too much reason say to our friends and people—"Ye have made us keepers of your vineyards, but our own vineyards have we not kept." How cold and wavering has our faith been in that Gospel which we profess to teach! How inordinately attached

to the present interests and enjoyments of ourselves, our families, and the world! How formal, lifeless, and unoperative are our devotional exercises! and how poor and unsteady our exertions for the honour of the Church of Christ, and for the salvation of immortal sinners! Such reflections become us to indulge. May the conviction of past miscarriages and neglect, equally humble us before God, and render us more watchful and zealous for the future!

But does not similar reproof and humiliation belong to you, the hearers of our message, and people of our charge? Are not ye also justly chargeable with neglect of God, carnality of mind, immoderate anxiety about the world, omission of prayer, in secret and in your families, want of mutual love, and loss of zeal for the glory of the Redeemer, and the good of souls? Yes, I feel a persuasion, that you to whom I now address these hints are ready to confess, that in most or all of these respects “there are sins with
“you against the Lord your God.” And let me farther ask, Are you content and satisfied under such convictions? Are you as happy

in your own souls, as orderly and comfortable in your houses, as respectable in life, as you have been when it was otherwise in your conduct, or as you might be, if animated with more of the Spirit of the Gospel? I am well assured, religion, in all its experience and fruits, is favourable to the happiness of every one; and I also know, that apostacy, folly, and indifference, are the greatest foes of peace, prosperity, and comfort. How affectingly are these sentiments illustrated by the present state of our respective churches, and of our country! God has indeed a controversy with us; and war, and alarm, and public fears, are certain proofs, as well of divine judgment, as of prevailing error and iniquity. But what is the actual state of dissenting churches? Is it not a glaring fact, that wherever the Faith of the Gospel is slighted, where the members become worldly, and where church discipline is violated, there “the glory is departed!” Yes, believe it, the purest and the strictest societies, in doctrine and order, are the most flourishing and useful. Let us, therefore, “Exhort one another daily; and strive to provoke unto love

“ and to good works : for the day is far spent,
 “ and the night is at hand.”

4. And to conclude the whole, *the prospect of Success* is an encouragement to exert ourselves for mutual and public benefit. Though we may not be able to compass all the objects here suggested, and though we may and must meet with many difficulties, yet if we truly engage, some good may be done;—and the very attempt is praise-worthy. Thus, while “ we water others, we shall ourselves be “ watered,” refreshed and enlivened: and every effort to explain and establish truth, will be a certain mean of instruction and comfort to our own souls. Thus united in one profession of evangelic sentiment; regularly engaging at the same time in the exercise of social prayer and praise; and frequently associating together for the more solemn and public services of religion, and the assertion and defence of our common principles—I say, thus united and actuated, we shall see our hands mutually strengthened, our respective Churches and Societies drawn into closer bonds of Christian friendship, and the faith of the Gospel more extensively imparted.

But may I not also justly argue the certain prospect of success from the promises of the Divine Word, illustrated as at this time, by the opening providence of God? Yes, Christians, the kingdom of our Lord shall come. The Sun of Righteousness is even now rising in his brightness. The thick, dark shade of Heathenism feels the power of his rays. Africans and Hindoos receive the word with gladness. Popish usurpations over conscience are remarkably curtailed; and Antichrist, in every place, trembles.

“ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye
 “ stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding
 “ in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye
 “ know that your labour is not in vain in the
 “ Lord.”

FINIS.

HOLY FORTITUDE.

AM I a Soldier of the Cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own his cause,
Or blush to speak his name?

Must I be carried to the Skies,
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail'd thro' bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to Grace,
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign,
Increase my courage Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by thy Word.

Thy Saints, in all this glorious war,
Shall conquer tho' they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
And seize it with their eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all thy Armies shine
In robes of Victory thro' the skies,
The Glory shall be thine.

Watts's Sermons.

ERRATA.

Title page,—In the Latin Motto, for *and*, read *et*.

Preface,—Put the *semicolon* after the word *Meeting*, in the 12th line from the top,

Page 19,—In Note, for *estimates*, read *estimate*.

Page 23,—In the 5th line from the bottom, add *It*.

Page 30,—Line 3d, for *spiritual*, read *spiritual*.

Page 33,—In Note, in the 7th line, add *and*.

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